Those who Set the Stage

3.0 Republicans and those who would resort to physical force

3.2.3 Maud Gonne MacBride and Inghinidhe na hÉireann

Maud Gonne contributed to the Rising by fostering the political awareness of women and by establishing Inghinidhe na hÉireann, some members of which were to participate in the Rising. Maud Gonne MacBride (1865-1953) was born at Aldershot in the south of England where her father, an army officer, was stationed. Her mother died while she was still a child. She was mainly educated by governesses, partly in France. She lived in Dublin for a period when her father was posted to the Curragh camp. On his death in her early twenties, she became financially independent. Around that time she came under the influence of the veteran Fenian John O’Leary, who introduced her to the revolutionary nationalist movement. He is also said to have introduced her to the poet W.B. Yeats, who was to remain infatuated with her for most, if not all, of his life and who was also to a certain extent influenced by her nationalist outlook. She later spent some years in France where she became involved in republicanism while close to the Boulangist Lucien Millevoye, by whom she had two children in the early 1890s.

Back in Ireland, she became one of the most prominent and colourful activists in various nationalist, socialist and feminist causes. She was particularly involved in countering evictions and in famine relief in counties Donegal and Mayo in the 1890s. She also took part in protests associated with the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 and the visit of King Edward VII in 1903. Much of her activity, however, was unfocused and ad
Maud Gonne MacBride and Inghinidhe na hÉireann

hoc: she appeared to be inspired by a positive hostility towards her native country and had no constructive strategy to advance the cause of Ireland.

Maud Gonne’s most notable contribution was to the establishment in April 1900 of Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland). The organisation was solely for women and adopted Saint Brigid as patron. Its agenda was political, social and feminist: it opposed the Irish Parliamentary Party and Home Rule, opting instead for full independence, but supported the Irish-Ireland movement, the concepts of self reliance preached by Sinn Féin, free meals in schools and women’s suffrage. It organised programmes of distinctively Irish cultural activities and promoted national self awareness. From 1908 onwards it published Bean na hÉireann (‘Irishwoman’), a nationalist womens’ journal. In 1914 Inghinidhe na hÉireann was absorbed into Cumann na mBan, the women’s auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers, although some trades union members then opted to join the Irish Citizen Army. In its time, Inghinidhe na hÉireann helped to politicise a generation of Irish women, many of whom afterwards participated in the 1916 Rising.

In 1901 Maud Gonne embarked on a lecture tour of the United States with Major John MacBride, who had organised the Irish Brigade and fought on the side of the Boers in South Africa. They married in 1903. MacBride was a Roman Catholic and Gonne converted to his faith before the marriage. On the failure of the marriage she settled in Paris where she continued to contribute to Bean na hÉireann and edited the news-sheet L’Irlande Libre, in both of which she advocated the use of physical force as a means of achieving national independence. She took no direct part in the 1916 Rising. She did not settle in Ireland again until 1917, by which time John MacBride had been executed for his part in the Rising.
3.2.3 Maud Gonne MacBride and Inghinidhe na hÉireann

Maud Gonne; a life-size photograph by Alfred Werner, 1893.
3.2.3 Maud Gonne MacBride and Inghinidhe na hÉireann

Pages from the first annual report of Inghinidhe na hÉireann.
3.2.3 Maud Gonne MacBride and Inghinidhe na hÉireann

Pages from the first annual report of Inghinidhe na hÉireann

4. To form a fund called the National Purposes Fund for the furtherance of the above objects. And its members, all of whom adopt a Maltese name, are pledged to mutual help and support and to work for the cause of Irish Independence.

The first public action of the Society was the presentation of a Blackrock Stick to Mr. Arthur Griffith, Editor of the United Irishman, for having harassed Mr. Colgan, Editor of the Dublin Pigmy, who had slandered Miss Gonne, President of Inghinidhe na hÉireann.

On the occasion of Queen Victoria’s last visit to Ireland, the Dublin and place-hunters of Dublin, unable to get up any popular demonstration of welcome for her, tried to make use of the innocent children, and in the English Queen’s name, invited all the School Children of Ireland to attend a demonstration in the Phoenix Park, special cheap excursion trains being run, and free tickets given to children from all parts of Ireland.

To the credit of our brave little ones let it be said, they resisted the inducements of cakes, sweets, and oranges held out by the jazz promenaders, and of the 35,000 children on the attendance roll of the Dublin Schools, only 5,000 allowed themselves to be dragged to the Phoenix Park and paraded before the English Queen; and these 5,000 children were mostly from the Union or Workhouse Schools, Masonic Schools, and similar institutions where the children had no choice in the matter.

Inghinidhe na hÉireann, proud of the sturdy resistance of the little Dublin children, resolved to reward them for their patriotism, and at once opened a subscription and organised the “Patriotic Children’s Trust,” which was held at Clontarf Park, Dublin, on Sunday, July 15, 1905. 35,000 children marched in procession from Bressenden Place to Clontarf Park; the procession took over an hour and a half to pass through the gates of the Park. It required 23 wagons to carry the cakes, sweets, oranges, ginger beer, etc., a large portion of which was contributed by the following firms: Mr. James Rankin, City Bakery; Mr. H. Kennedy, Brompton Street; Mr. John Daly, Mayor of Limerick; Mr. Warrington, Westminster Street; Messrs. Darby, Forrest, Bolier, McCarthy, Goggin, Spawnn, Walter Cole, etc., etc.; while Mr. Thomas Byrne lent his horses and wagons, besides working night and day to help the Committee with the organisation of the Trust.

During the Paris Exhibition the Irish Nationalist Committee invited the Irish Nationalist Societies to send delegates to Paris. Inghinidhe na hÉireann appointed Miss Gonne, Mrs. Wyse Power, Mrs. James F. Ryan, and Miss M. T. Quinlan to represent them. The delegates were present at the Banquet, and at the Reception at the Hotel de Ville given in their honour, and at the great Military Review of the 14th July.

In October the Society started its Winter Session, and classes were held regularly every Tuesday and Thursday evening for the teaching of Irish, History, Singing, and Irish to the children. The number of children attending the classes increased until the Class Rooms were unable to hold them and the Society was obliged to look out for larger premises. On the 5th and 9th December, 1,000 of the children were entertained at Thurs in the Hall of the Workmen’s Club, York Street, kindly lent by the Committee for the occasion. The entertainment consisted of Magic Lantern Views of Irish Historical Subjects, and of music from the Door War, explained by Miss Gonne, a Concert of Irish Music, and a liberal supply of cakes, sweets, oranges, etc.

A number of children from the Society’s Classes were sent forward for competition at the Leinster Fete held on the 16th March at the Rotunda, some of whom obtained a first prize,
In 1892 Maud Gonne contributed a series of articles to the French periodical Journal de Voyage under the title 'Le Martyre de l'Irlande.' That featured here recalls an incident in 1888 in which Father McFadden of Derrybeg, Co. Donegal, a noted defender of the rights of tenant farmers, became involved in a fracas in which a police inspector was accidentally killed.
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